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(54) **MULTI-SOURCE SWITCHING IN A
TELEVISION SYSTEM**

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now abandoned, which is a continuation of application
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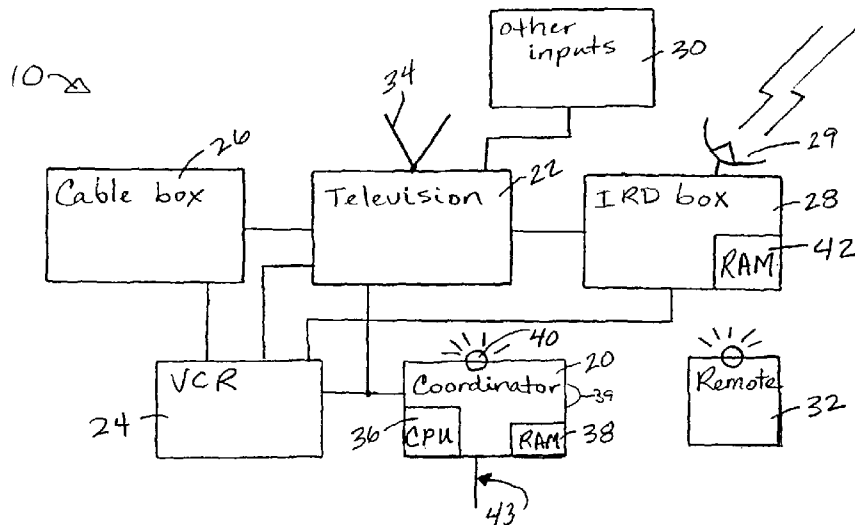
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present invention provides a tuning scheme for coordi-
nating schedule information and programs received from
multiple sources (26, 28, 30 and 34). In the preferred embod-
iment, an identifier associated with the program's channel (52)
is used to identify a source device (26, 28, 30 or 34). When a
user selects a program (60 or 62) listed in displayed schedule
information (50), the system (10) reads the source identifier
attached to the program's channel (52). The system (10) then
carries out an automatic switching/tuning such that the
required source device (26, 28, 30 or 34) is input to the
destination device (22), and a tuner is then tuned to the
selected program's channel (52).

29 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



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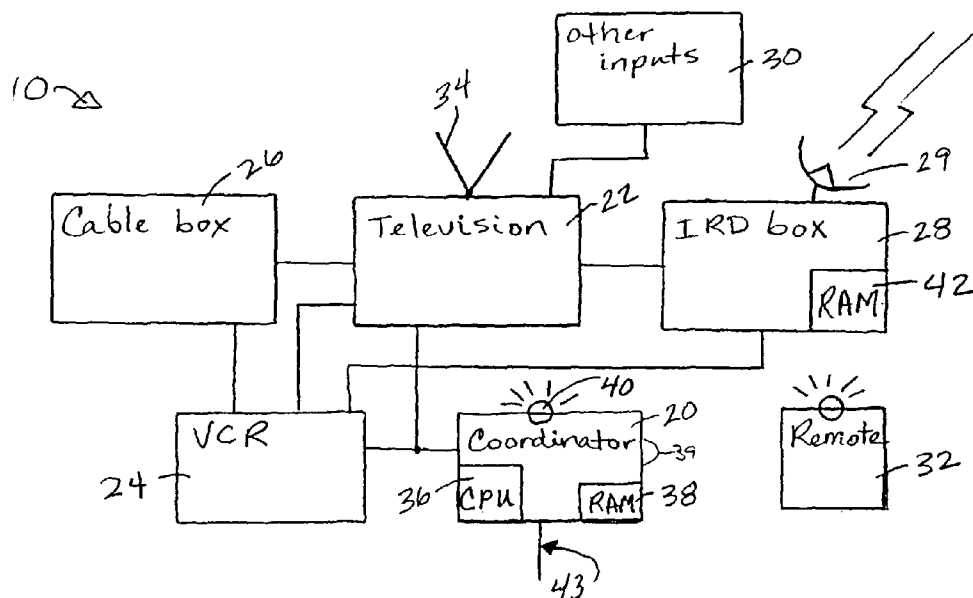


Fig 1a.

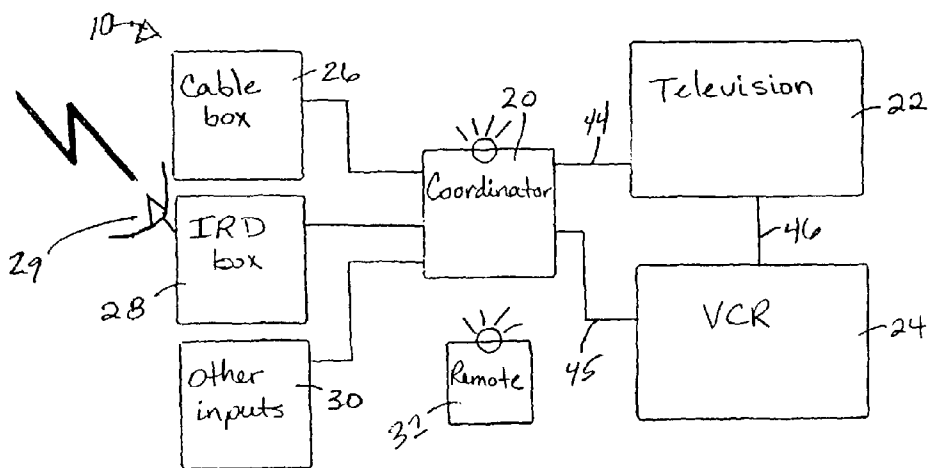
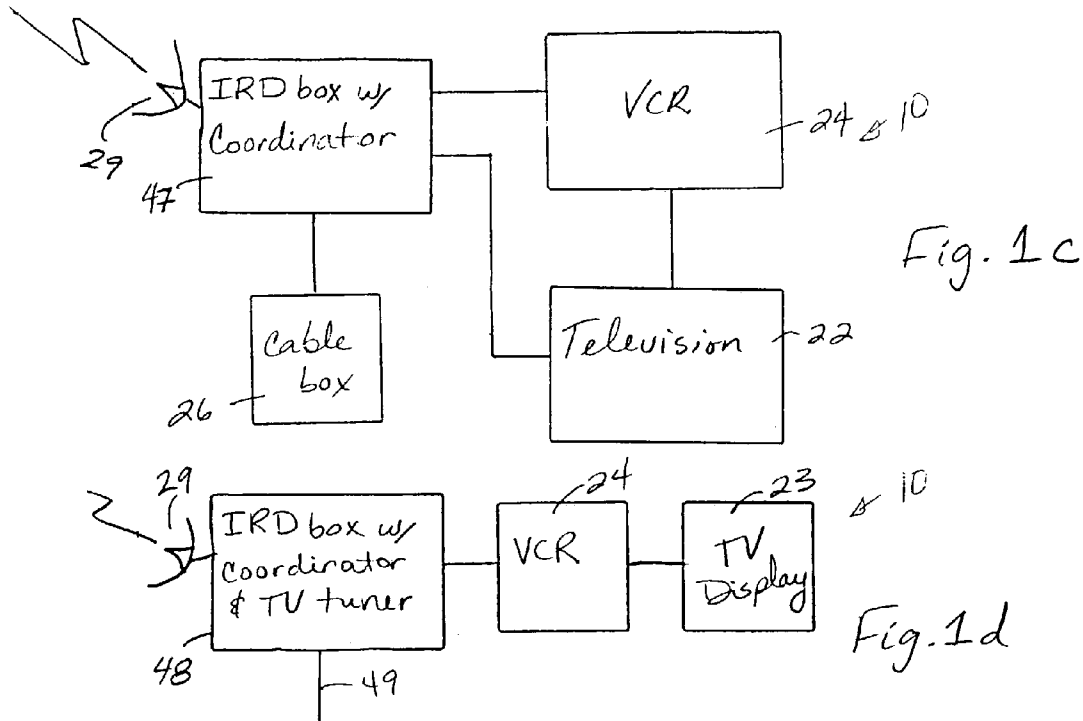


Fig. 1b



CH	1:00pm	1:30pm	2:00pm	...
2	Batman™	→	Soap™	
3	E.T.™	→	→	→
4	news	→	Sport event	→
HBO	special presentation	→	→	→
⋮				

Fig. 2

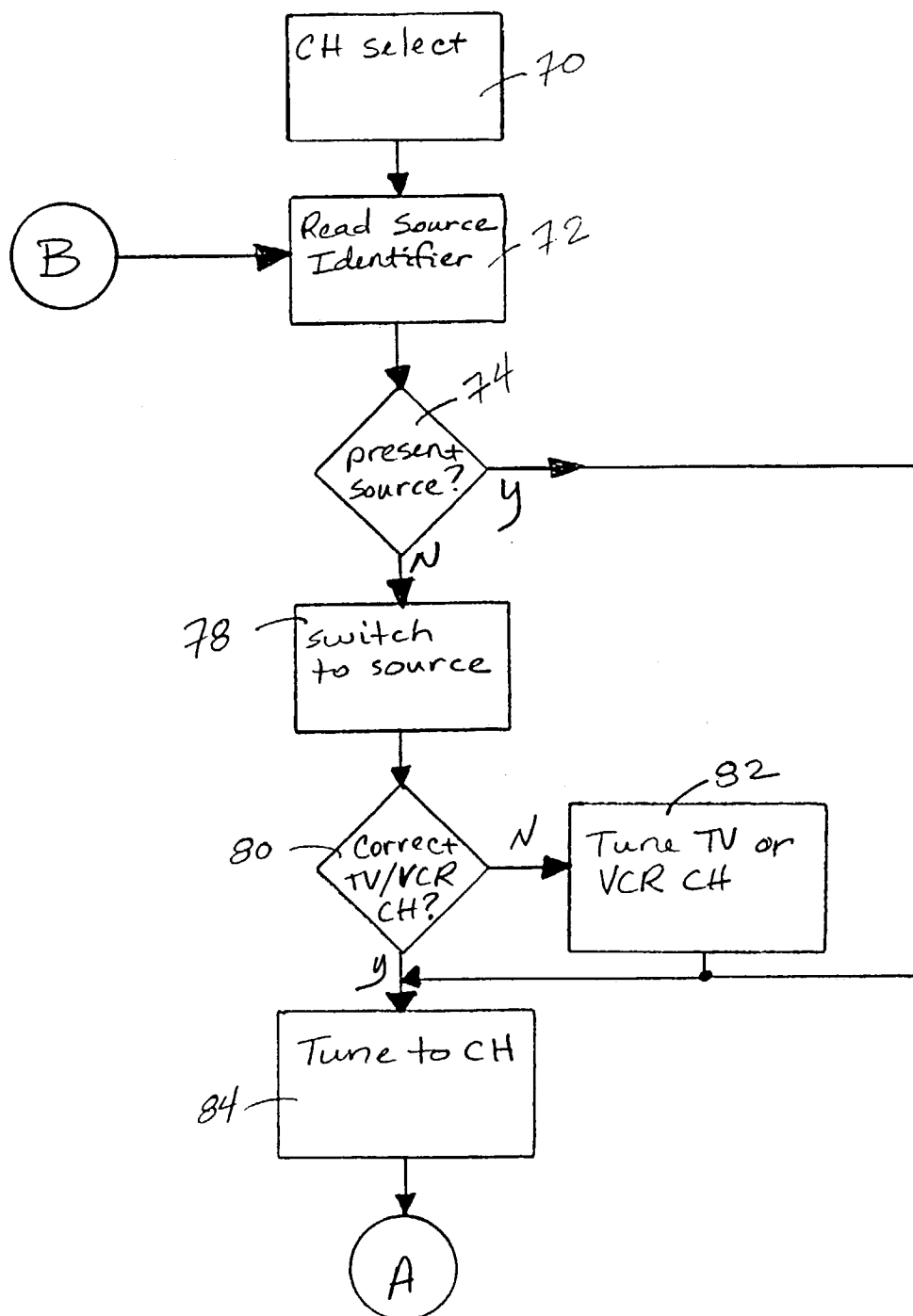


Fig. 3

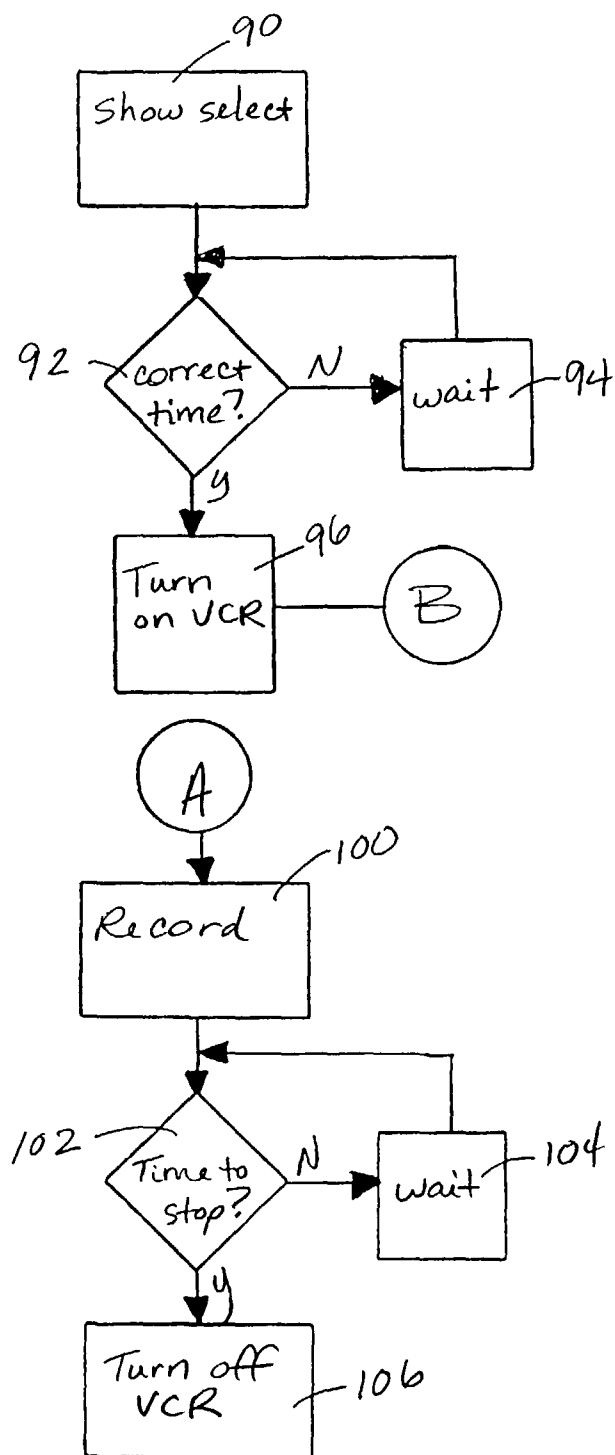


Fig. 4

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MULTI-SOURCE SWITCHING IN A TELEVISION SYSTEM

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/612,352, filed Jul. 6, 2000 now abandoned, which is a continuation application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 08/810,199 filed Mar. 3, 1997 (abandoned), which is a continuation application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 08/423,410, filed Apr. 17, 1995 (abandoned).

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The prior art includes several arrangements for presenting information associated with a television schedule guide. This information is often used to provide an on-screen grid-like display of the available channels along with their related television shows. Usually, a list of available channels are displayed on the y-axis and time slots occupy the x-axis. These listed channels can appear sequentially or in any preferred, predetermined order within the display on the television. U.S. Pat. No. 5,353,121 is representative of such systems, and has found wide success in the industry. U.S. Pat. No. 5,353,121 is hereby incorporated by reference.

Many different transmission schemes are available for providing the information required for a television schedule guide. For example, a Direct Broadcast Satellite System (DBS) can provide television programs and television program schedule information via a satellite dish in conjunction with a set-top receiver. DBS systems are commercially available from, for example, Hughes and PrimeStar. In addition, conventional satellite dishes, coax cable, telephone lines, fibre optic cable, antennae, etc. are used to distribute television program and/or program schedule information.

If DBS is subscribed to by a user, then a separate IRD (integrated receiving decoder) box with an on-screen display generator is usually provided. An IRD box usually includes a receiver and a tuner at the most basic level. A DBS subscriber receives access to potentially hundreds of television channels along with a program guide provided/controlled by the DBS service provider. Unfortunately, a DBS system normally does not receive local network or local independent channels. In order to provide these missing local channels, some DBS receivers are capable of automatically switching between the DBS satellite input and a local input. This is accomplished by placing the IRD box between the television (or a VCR connected to the television) and the local line (local cable or local antennae). When a local channel is selected by the user, the IRD box automatically removes DBS from service and becomes a bypass for the local input. A user can select a local channel either manually or with a remote control. Access to locally available channels is crucial because the majority of prime time viewing is on those local networks.

In contrast, if a user is receiving television channels from both cable and a local antenna sources, then the scenario is different. If the user's television has multiple television input ports, then these two sources can easily be attached to the two input ports. This solution works well as long as the number of sources does not become greater than the number of television input ports.

If the user's television does not have multiple inputs, then a manual switch box attached to the multiple sources and to the television input can be utilized. This solution forces the user to manually switch between one source and another

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depending on which channel is desired. For example, if the user wants the local news, which is available from the local antennae, and the switch is set to cable, then the user must manually switch from cable to the local antenna. In a society filled with remote controls and automation, this solution is unacceptable to many consumers. Moreover, manually switching between channels becomes more complicated as the number of channel sources is increased.

While the IRD box, multiple television input ports, manual switching unit, etc. provide non-automated and sometimes partial solutions to the above-described problems, a more versatile technique is needed.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In the preferred embodiment, the present invention is directed to coordinating input signals and program information, and more particularly to (1) coordinating television schedule guide information received from multiple sources, (2) automatically switching to a desired signal source, and (3) tuning to a desired television program. Thus, the present invention provides a tuning scheme which coordinates television schedule guide information. This information can be received from numerous sources. These sources include an incoming cable line (e.g., on a coax cable), satellite broadcasts, a dedicated telephone line (e.g., twisted pair), and any other medium capable of transmitting a signal.

The present invention provides a method of operating a television system. This method of operation includes the inputting and storing of system channel guide information. The system channel guide information is received from multiple television sources and includes a source identifier. When the user inputs a desired program, the source identifier is used to select the source associated with that desired program from the available television signal sources. The selected source is then tuned to the desired program.

These and other advantages will become apparent to those skilled in this art upon a reading of the following detailed description of the invention, which should be taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1a is a block diagram of a multi-source television program and television schedule guide system with multiple sources connected directly to the television;

FIG. 1b is a block diagram of a multi-source television program and television schedule guide system with the multiple sources connected directly to the coordinator;

FIG. 1c is a block diagram of a television program and television schedule guide system with DBS and cable as source devices;

FIG. 1d is a block diagram of a television program and television guide system which has DBS, the coordinator, and the television tuner all within the same IRD box;

FIG. 2 is an example of an on-screen display of a schedule grid guide that has been assembled from the television guide information;

FIG. 3 is an exemplary process flow chart for automatic tuning; and

FIG. 4 is an exemplary process flow chart for automatic, unattended recording.

DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

The present invention provides a tuning scheme which coordinates television programs and television schedule

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guide information. This television schedule guide information can be received from numerous sources. As stated above, these sources include an incoming cable line (e.g., on a coax cable), satellite broadcasts, a dedicated telephone line (e.g., twisted pair), and any other medium capable of transmitting a signal. In the preferred embodiment, television channel broadcasts are received from at least two separate sources such as (1) cable and a satellite dish, or (2) two different satellites, or (3) local cable and DBS sources. The schedule information is provided with a source identifier which identifies that schedule information as being from a particular source. The schedule information is sorted and displayed in an organized fashion to the user.

When a user selects a show or channel located on one of the displayed channels within a displayed guide, the system reads the source identifier associated with that show or channel. In the preferred embodiment, the system then carries out an automatic switching/tuning process that switches the input to the television (either RF or video) to a source device. Source devices include DBS, cable box, television tuner, etc. The system then tunes to the required channel for the desired show. Additionally, the source identifier can be utilized to switch between various devices automatically when unattended VCR programming is desired. Furthermore, when program information is received from multiple satellite sources and a desired channel is selected, the present invention can, in one embodiment, automatically move the customer's satellite dish such that the customer receives the desired program from the associated source. The present invention then tunes to the correct channel.

In creating a merged television guide, a channel map is created which identifies the channels available on the multiple sources, and identifies their source. For example, in the case of DBS/local channel implementations, a channel map is created with both local cable and DBS channels merged. The local channels and the DBS channels are tagged with a source identifier. When the user/consumer selects a non-DBS channel from the guide, the integrated receiver decoder unit (IRD box) for the satellite switches the IRD to couple the local cable to the receiver. The system then tunes the television tuner or other tuning device to the required channel. If a DBS channel is later selected, the system switches the IRD to couple the satellite receiver/decoder to the receiver. The system then tunes the DBS tuner to the selected DBS channel. In the case of, for example, cable and antenna inputs, the system switches to the correct video input and then tunes the television tuner to the required channel for receiving the selected source. Thus, automatic access to multi-source television schedule guide information is provided.

In another embodiment of the present invention, the user can utilize the system to switch between destination devices. For example, information/programs received from one of the multiple sources could be displayed on a computer screen or played on a stereo. Additionally, several destination devices can be used in conjunction with each other. For example, an FM radio station playlist could be shown on a computer monitor or television display, and the songs selected from that playlist could be later recorded on an audio recorder. Still further, the system could be used to couple audio TV outputs to a stereo system. Thus, the present invention is not limited to television systems.

FIG. 1a illustrates in simplified form an example of a multi-source television schedule guide system 10 with multiple sources connected directly to a television 22. As shown, multi-source television program and television schedule guide system 10 operates under the control of coordinator 20. Television 22 and VCR 24 are provided with input from cable

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box 26 and IRD box 28. Other inputs 30 may also be supplied to the television 22 and/or VCR 24. A remote control 32 is used by a viewer to tune the television and conduct other operations. In this embodiment, cable is provided via cable box 26, and DBS is provided via IRD box 28. Antennae 34 on television 22 may be used as an additional source of television broadcasts along with cable box 26, IRD box 28, and other inputs 30. In one typical embodiment, antenna 34 and cable box 26 are "local" sources. Other inputs 30 can include multiple satellite sources. When multiple satellite sources are present, coordinator 20 switches between the available satellite sources by automatically moving the user's satellite dish or switching between satellite dishes. In order to automatically move the satellite dish, a memory within IRD box 28 tracks the position of the DBS satellite dish in relation to satellite sources which are available via the DBS satellite dish. The IRD box 28 then automatically positions the DBS satellite dish such that the desired satellite source is received by the IRD box 28.

Coordinator 20 includes processor (CPU) 36 and memory (RAM) 38. The coordinator is connected to and controls infrared (IR) emitter(s) 40. IR receiver 39 is connected to coordinator 20 and receives input from the remote. IR emitter(s) 40 can be replaced by, for example, a bus interface or an RF transmitter. The IR emitter(s) 40 controls one or more of IRD box 28, television 22, VCR 24, cable box 26, and other inputs 30. Thus, IR emitter 40 acts as a remote control device by emulating remote control signals of television 22, VCR 24, cable box 26, and/or other devices. Because coordinator 20 has the ability to simulate a remote controller, coordinator 20 can be placed in the cable box 26, VCR 24, television 22, stand alone unit 20, or a satellite receiver.

Remote control 32 is a hand held remote controller for controlling coordinator 20. In the preferred embodiment, remote control 32 is provided with an IR transmitter which controls the coordinator via IR receiver 39. Other remote controls, not shown in FIG. 1a, can be used for manually controlling television 22, VCR 24, cable box 26, IRD box 28, and other inputs 30. Although, in a preferred embodiment, coordinator 20 performs all the necessary control functions of the system. In a preferred embodiment, remote 32 works with coordinator 20 and emitter 40 to control the various devices in FIG. 1a. For example, as the user adjusts the volume control on remote 32, coordinator 20 emits signals through IR emitter 40 to adjust the volume in television 22.

IRD box 28 receives television programs along with other information via, in one embodiment, satellite dish 29. IRD box 28 then provides program schedule information to the system. The schedule information is added to the transmitted signal by the DBS service provider or a company under contract. Examples of DBS service providers include Direct TV and USSB. This program schedule information (or guide) may also include a channel map that contains the channel information which is available on a particular source. Information associated with the DBS guide is saved in the IRD box receiver's RAM 42 or downloaded. Similarly, program guide information can be received through cable box 26, other inputs 30, antennae 34, and/or through any other transmission medium (e.g., dedicated twisted pair telephone line). Each of these sources may also be provided with television schedule data within the signal transmitted by the service provider.

Coordinator 20 finds and sorts the program guide information available in system 10. In order to receive the required television guide information, coordinator 20 is connected to the source(s) of this information. For example, if the channel map information is provided by a dedicated twisted pair telephone line, then that telephone line is input 43 to coordinator

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20. Guide information can be provided from any commercially available medium and can apply to all or several of the available sources. In the preferred embodiment, television guide information is provided via the vertical blanking interval on an available television channel. In FIG. 1a, the source devices along with coordinator 20 are coupled to television 22. Thus, coordinator 20 receives the program guide information via telephone line 43, and television 22 receives the television programs from the multiple sources. In addition, television 22 receives the program guide information from coordinator 20.

In another embodiment of the present invention, coordinator 20 receives all the source device inputs directly. FIG. 1b is a block diagram of a multi-source television program and television schedule guide system with the multiple sources connected directly to the coordinator. In this embodiment, coordinator 20 switches between the multiple sources 26, 28 and 30 and then outputs the information from the desired source to television 22 or to another destination device. This arrangement allows for a single input to television 22. Coordinator 20 inputs program guide information along with television programs to television 22 via line 44 or through VCR 24 via lines 45 and 46. Other possible destination devices for the present invention are computer monitors, audio recorders, facsimile machines, printers, memory, etc.

In yet another embodiment of the present invention, DBS (via IRD box 28) and cable (via cable box 26) are source devices which are connected in series to television 22. FIG. 1c is a block diagram of a television program and television schedule guide system with DBS and cable as source devices. In this arrangement, the coordinator is located within IRD box 47, and no IR emitter is needed. IRD box 47 inputs to television 22 directly or through VCR 24. When DBS is removed from service by the coordinator within IRD box 47, cable box 26 inputs to television 22.

FIG. 1d is a block diagram of a television program and television guide system which has DBS, the coordinator, and the television tuner all within the same IRD box. In this additional embodiment, no cable source is present, and DBS, the coordinator and the television tuner are all located within IRD box 48. Thus, no emitter is needed. The coordinator switches between DBS and other available source(s) received on line 49. After the coordinator has switched and tuned to the desired channel, (as described below) that channel is displayed on television display 23 or recorded by VCR 24. The VCR set forth in FIGS. 1a-1d is optional. Additionally, the DBS receiver and tuner could be located within the television or the VCR.

Various formats can be used for the television schedule information. For example, data packets comprising a header section and information section can be received and sorted with other, more complex data packet formats. In the preferred embodiment, coordinator 20 takes the television schedule information from the available source(s) or a data input line and sorts/mixes it. For example, coordinator 20 may receive program schedule information via the vertical blanking interval in a television channel or via a transponder of DBS.

In order to sort/mix the available schedule information, coordinator 20 first creates a structured framework and then saves the received data in that structured framework. This structure framework includes several levels for organized data storage. After the levels of the framework are prepared by coordinator 20, pointers are utilized to save data within appropriate levels of the structure.

In an alternative arrangement, the sorting/mixing of program schedule information is done in a separate location and

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then provided to system 10, for example, on a satellite channel. Thus, program schedule information, which has already been mixed, sorted, organized, etc., is received in a format which is ready for immediate display. Less memory is required within the coordinator in this latter situation because only the screen/grid being viewed needs to be saved. For example, in this latter situation, if a user wishes to view a grid guide which is four hours long, only four hours worth of information needs to be saved within RAM 38. This ready-for-immediate-display format can also be provided in a separate data stream via a different medium or on a television channel.

FIG. 2 is an example of an on-screen display of a schedule grid guide that has been assembled from the television guide information. The grid guide of the present invention also refers to and includes theme guides, channel guides, and other guides which display program information. In the preferred embodiment, after coordinator 20 has collected and sorted all the available program guide information, coordinator 20 generates the grid guide set forth in FIG. 2 for display on television 22. This grid guide can also be generated within the IRD box, a satellite receiver, the television, the VCR, a central office location, etc. The grid guide, designated generally with the reference numeral 50, provides a line up of all channels or a selection of channels 52 along with a description of the shows 54 available on those channels at certain times 56. For example, channel 2 58 has BATMAN 60 as a show from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. and SOAP 62 as a show from 2:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. A theme, or channel, or random, etc. listing can be used instead of the grid guide shown in FIG. 2.

If a grid guide is used, the lineup of channels 52 can be arranged such that (1) channels are in numerical and/or alphabetical order, or (2) channels are in an order associated with their particular source, or (3) channels are in a mixed order programmed by a user, or (4) channels are in any other arrangement. When multiple sources are used for receiving television channels, an overlap of channels sometimes occurs. For example, both cable and DBS may carry the network ABC, but cable may have ABC on channel 6 and DBS may have ABC on channel 7. By having the ability to delete and activate the channels displayed in grid guide 50, the user can determine whether to have one of the ABC channels, both of the ABC channels, or neither of the ABC channels. The user's choice is entered into coordinator 20 via remote control 32. In an alternative embodiment, coordinator 20 may automatically note duplicate network names and delete one of the duplicates. In addition, coordinator 20 is capable of automatically lining up channels based on user's habits. If this mode for the automatic arrangement of channels is selected by the user, an algorithm based on user habits is used to determine the channel order 52. Therefore, any desired arrangement for the lineup of channels 52 is available.

In the preferred embodiment, the user displays grid guide 50 by pressing a guide button on remote control 32. Coordinator 20 responds to the initial pressing of the guide button by automatically tuning to the channel or device which carries grid guide 50, or overlaying a grid guide in a current broadcast. When the user is done with grid guide 50, the user presses the guide button again (or an exit button) and coordinator 20 (1) automatically returns to the channel or source last viewed by the user or (2) removes the overlay. The technique utilized by coordinator 20 for automatic tuning is described further below.

In order to track which channels are available from which sources, a source identifier is located on each channel. Each of the source identifiers may be included in the channel guide information, or the source identifiers may be added by the

system based on the origin of the channel guide information. Therefore, if these data are not already provided, coordinator **20** attaches the appropriate identifiers to the received channel guide information. For example, if BATMAN **60** is received through IRD box **28**, then BATMAN **60** will have a source identifier for identifying the IRD box **28** located on its channel **58**. In the preferred embodiment, the source identifier is not displayed to the user. If desired, the user can program coordinator **20** to display which source the channel is associated with. For example, channels which come from cable box **26** can be colored red in grid guide **50** and channels available from IRD box **28** can be the color green; thus, if desired, the user can easily identify which source is associated with each channel.

Remote **32** can be utilized by the user to program coordinator **20** or to move between different channels, times and shows in grid guide **50**. Moreover, remote control **32** can be used to select a certain channel or show (1) for displaying additional information associated with a particular show, (2) for tuning to a particular channel or show, or (3) for automatically recording a particular show. Remote control **32** can also be used for adjusting the volume or other features of television **22** or other devices. The additional information associated with a particular show may include a short description of that show. For example, a short description of the story included in a sitcom may be provided. To display this additional information, coordinator **20** accesses the desired information in RAM **38** or switches to a different input of data, and displays the additional information in an appropriate place within grid guide **50**. In the preferred embodiment, this additional information is displayed (1) in an overlay, or (2) as a pull down window under the selected show, or (3) as a defined information window at the top or the bottom of the screen.

FIG. **3** is an exemplary process flow chart for automatic tuning. To begin automatic tuning, the user selects a certain channel or show at step **70**. The selection may be made by, for example, scrolling a cursor to a desired show and striking the "enter" key, or entering a channel number using remote **32**. Coordinator **20** then reads the source identifier at step **72** and determines if the present input to television **22** is the source associated with the source identifier (see step **74**). If the present input source to television **22** is the same as the source associated with the source identifier, then coordinator **20** tunes that particular source to the desired channel at step **84**. If the present source is not the source associated with the source identifier, then the system switches sources to the proper source. For example, processor **36** may cause IR emitter **40** to send out a signal which switches from the present source, and which activates or switches to the source associated with the source identifier. The desired channel or show then serves as the source inputting information to television **22**. Coordinator **20** then determines if the correct television channel or input for that particular source (the source associated with the source identifier) is activated at step **80**. If the correct television channel or input is not activated, then the appropriate tuner in the system is tuned to the proper channel. For example, IR emitter **40** may be used to tune the television to the desired television channel at step **82**. Alternatively, step **80** could be removed, and coordinator **20** would then always tune or re-tune to the required channel, thereby confirming that television **22** is on the correct channel. After (or simultaneously with) the activation of the correct television channel or input associated with the desired source, IR emitter **40** tunes the receiver in that source to the desired channel at step **84**. The desired broadcast is then displayed on television **22**. If a program is input to television **22** and/or VCR **24** via coordinator **20** (see FIG. **1b**), then no tuning is needed for the

television and/or VCR. Therefore, in this latter arrangement, steps **80** and **82** are not present.

To further illustrate the process set forth in FIG. **3**, the following example is provided. In this example, IRD box **28** has channels 100-200 available and is presently the input source to television **22** (see FIG. **1c**). Additionally, cable box **26** is an input to IRD box **28** (see FIG. **1c**). A user selects BATMAN **60** on channel 2 **58** at step **70**. The selected show is available on a channel from cable box **26**. Coordinator **20** reads the source identifier associated with the selected show and determines that channel 2 is from cable box **26** at step **72**. Coordinator **20** then determines that the present source is IRD box **28** at step **74**. Therefore, a switching of sources must occur. As set forth above, when DBS is no longer the selected source, IRD box **28** allows cable box **26** to send signals through an internal relay (electronic or mechanical) within IRD box **28** to television **22**. Therefore, coordinator **20** utilizes IR emitter **40** to deactivate or decouple DBS at step **78**. IRD box **28** is inputted to television **22** through channel 3 of television **22**. In the present arrangement, cable box **26** is also connected through channel 3 of television **22**. Coordinator **20** may then check television **22** to ensure that it is on channel 3, as required for input from cable box **26** (see step **80**). Since television **22** is already on channel 3, no change is made to the television channel (see step **84**). Coordinator **20** then utilizes IR emitter **40** to tune cable box **26** to the desired channel 2 at step **84**. As stated above, step **82** and step **84** can occur simultaneously. The program on is then displayed on television **22**, and the process set forth in FIG. **3** is complete. In other embodiments, the television tuner will be used to select from numerous inputs from the sources, or a mixed system may provide that the television tuner is used for some sources, and the source tuner is used for other sources.

FIG. **4** is an exemplary process flow chart for automatic, unattended recording. To begin automatic, unattended recording, the user selects a television show for recording with remote **32**. In order to provide the automatic recording of the selected program, VCR **24** is automatically turned "on" (along with the activation of the VCR's record feature) at the appropriate time and then turned "off" when the show is complete. The tuning process used for automatic recording is the same as the process set forth for automatic tuning (see FIG. **3**), but the VCR is tuned to the correct channel rather than the television.

As set forth in FIG. **4**, after the user selects a show at step **90**, the coordinator checks to see if the beginning time for that show has passed (see step **92**). If the beginning time has not passed, coordinator **20** waits at step **94**. When the correct time (the program's starting time) does occur, VCR **24** is turned "on" (see step **96**) and coordinator **20** acts as though automatic tuning has occurred. Therefore coordinator **20** reads the source identifier associated with the channel providing the selected show at step **72** (see FIG. **3**). This transition between the process flow for automatic recording and the process flow for automatic tuning is indicated by B. During the tuning sequence for automatic recording, the VCR, rather than the television, is tuned to the correct channel (see steps **80** and **82**). When the process flow set forth in FIG. **3** is complete, as indicated by A, coordinator **20** utilizes IR emitter **40** to activate the recording feature of the VCR at step **100** in FIG. **4**. This causes VCR **24** to record the selected program. Coordinator **20** then checks to see if the end time of the show matches the present time at step **102**. If the show is not over, coordinator **20** waits at step **104**. When the end time for the show matches the present time, IR emitter **40** stops recording the show and then turns "off" the VCR at step **106**. This scheme

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allows for the unattended, automatic recording of any show available from any source coupled to VCR 24.

In another embodiment of the present invention, coordinator 20 is located within IRD box 28, and coordinator 20 handles the switching and tuning required for DBS and cable sources without utilizing an IR emitter. When the user/consumer selects a non-DBS channel from the guide, the coordinator switches from the integrated receiver decoder unit for the satellite to the cable (if the source is originally DBS), and proceeds to tune the television tuner, or television tuner and cable box to the required channel. If a DBS channel is later selected, the system switches back to the integrated receiver decoder unit and tunes to the required DBS channel. This arrangement allows for the coordinating of multi-sources without the need for an IR emitter.

With the assistance of coordinator 20, a user does not have to manually select a television program source or manually tune to a desired channel or program. Moreover, with the automatic receiving, grid guide generating, switching, and tuning available in system 10, there is little if any manual interaction from the end user or customer.

While a full and complete disclosure of the invention has been provided herein above, it will be obvious to those skilled in the art that various modifications and changes may be made.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for delivering television signals from at least two different television program source devices, wherein each program source is operative to transmit a plurality of television channels, wherein the television signals from the at least two different television program source devices are received by an input of a television appliance, the method comprising the steps of:

storing in a memory,

(1) a first program listing and a first source identifier associated with the first program listing, and a second program listing and a second source identifier associated with the second program listing, wherein each of the first and second program listings includes a channel identifier, wherein the first and second source identifiers are different from the channel identifiers of the associated program listings and represent a first source device, and wherein the first and second program listings are received from the first source device when the input of the television appliance is coupled to the first source device, and

(2) a third program listing and a third source identifier associated with the third program listing, and a fourth program listing and a fourth source identifier associated with the fourth program listing, wherein each of the third and fourth program listings includes a channel identifier, wherein the third and fourth source identifiers are different from the channel identifiers of the associated program listings and represent a second source device, and wherein the third and fourth program listings are received from the second source device when the input of the television appliance is coupled to the second source device;

simultaneously displaying at least the first and third program listings;

simultaneously displaying indications of both the first and third source identifiers, which are different from the channel identifiers of the first and third program listings, together with the simultaneously displayed first and third program listings;

receiving a user selection of the displayed first program listing; and

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in response to the user selection of the displayed first program listing, performing the following steps:

(1) retrieving from the memory the first source identifier associated with the selected displayed first program listing;

(2) identifying the first source device that is represented by the first source identifier; and

(3) automatically and without further user action: disconnecting the input of the television appliance from the second source device, coupling the input of the television appliance to the identified first source device, and tuning the identified first source device to a television signal of the program represented by the selected displayed first program listing.

2. The method of claim 1, in which the appliance is a monitor and the disconnecting, coupling and tuning steps provide the television signal to the monitor for display thereon.

3. The method of claim 1, in which the appliance is a VCR and the disconnecting, coupling and tuning steps provide the television signal to the VCR for recording.

4. The method of claim 1, additionally comprising the step of downloading EPG data from at least one of the sources.

5. The method of claim 1, additionally comprising the step of downloading EPG data from different sources.

6. The method of claim 5, in which the EPG data representing each program listing is downloaded from the source represented by the source identifier for such listing.

7. The method of claim 1, in which the source identifiers are stored with channel identifiers for each source in the memory as a channel map.

8. The method of claim 1, in which the displaying step displays the program listings on a monitor.

9. The method of claim 1, in which the program is currently being telecast and the disconnecting, coupling and tuning steps occur immediately.

10. The method of claim 1, in which the program is to be telecast in the future and the disconnecting, coupling and tuning steps occur when the program is telecast.

11. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

receiving individual channel guide information listings from at least two information sources at a television distribution facility;

merging said individual channel guide information listings to form a consolidated channel guide information listing at the television distribution facility;

transmitting the consolidated channel guide information listings and a source identifier for each listing to a user equipment device; and

displaying some of the consolidated program listings in a single guide format.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein the first television program source device is a cable, a satellite or an antenna source device and the second television program source device is a different one of the cable, the satellite or the antenna source device.

13. The method of claim 1, wherein the source identifiers that are different from the channel identifiers are displayed with the program listings and the channel identifiers.

14. The method of claim 1, further comprising simultaneously displaying at least one of the first and second source identifiers with at least one of the respective channel identifiers and first and second program listings, and at least one of the third and fourth source identifiers with at least one of the respective channel identifiers and third and fourth program listings.

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15. The method of claim 1, wherein the first and second program listings and the first and second source identifiers are stored simultaneously with the third and fourth program listings and the third and fourth source identifiers.

16. The method of claim 1, wherein the first and second program listings are received from the first source device at a first time, and wherein the third and fourth program listings are received from the second source device at a second time.

17. The method of claim 1, wherein the simultaneously displayed source identifiers are simultaneously displayed without user input.

18. A system for delivering television signals from at least two different television program source devices, wherein each source device is operative to transmit a plurality of television channels, wherein the television signals from the at least two different television program source devices are received by an input of a television appliance, the system comprising:

a receiver for receiving EPG data from the at least two different source devices, the data representing listings of television programs telecast from the different source devices;

a memory, coupled to the receiver, for storing

(1) a first program listing and a first source identifier associated with the first program listing, and a second program listing and a second source identifier associated with the second program listing, wherein each of the first and second program listings includes a channel identifier, wherein the first and second source identifiers are different from the channel identifiers of the associated program listings and represent a first source device, and wherein the first and second program listings are received from the first source device when the input of the television appliance is coupled to the first source device, and

(2) a third program listing and a third source identifier associated with the third program listing, and a fourth program listing and a fourth source identifier associated with the fourth program listing, wherein each of the third and fourth program listings includes a channel identifier, wherein the third and fourth source identifiers are different from the channel identifiers of the associated program listings and represent a second source device, and wherein the third and fourth program listings are received from the second source device when the input of the television appliance is coupled to the second source device;

a display, coupled to the memory, for:

simultaneously displaying at least the first and third program listings; and

simultaneously displaying indications of both the first and third source identifiers, which are different from the channel identifiers of the first and third program listings, together with the simultaneously displayed first and third program listings;

a remote control for transmitting a user selection of the displayed first program listing;

a controller, coupled to said memory, for receiving an indicator signal associated with the selected displayed first program listing from the remote control, wherein the controller, in response to the user selection of the displayed first program listing:

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(1) retrieves from the memory the first source identifier associated with the selected displayed first program listing; and

(2) identifies the first source device that is represented by the first source identifier; and

an emitter, coupled to the controller, configured to transmit, automatically and without further user action in response to the user selection of the displayed first program listing, a control signal that:

disconnects the input of the television appliance from the second source device,

couple the input of the television appliance to the identified first source device, and

tunes the identified first source device to a television signal of the program represented by the selected displayed first program listing.

19. The system of claim 18, in which the appliance is a monitor.

20. The system of claim 18, in which the appliance is a VCR.

21. The system of claim 18, in which the source identifiers are stored with channel identifiers for each source in the memory as a channel map.

22. The system of claim 18, in which the EPG data further includes the source identifier for each program listing.

23. The system of claim 18 further comprising means for identifying the source of each program listing for associating the corresponding source identifier to the program listing.

24. The system of claim 18 further comprising:

a receiver for receiving individual channel guide information listings from at least two information sources at a television distribution facility;

a microprocessor coupled to the receiver for merging said individual channel guide information listings to form a consolidated channel guide information listing at the television distribution facility;

a transmitter for transmitting the consolidated channel guide information listings and a source identifier for each listing to a user equipment device; and

a display for displaying some of the consolidated program listings in a single guide format.

25. The system of claim 18 wherein the first television program source device is a cable, a satellite or an antenna source device and the second television program source device is a different one of the cable, the satellite or the antenna source device.

26. The system of claim 18, wherein the source identifiers that are different from the channel identifiers are displayed with the program listings and the channel identifiers.

27. The system of claim 18, further comprising a display for simultaneously displaying at least one of the first and second source identifiers with at least one of the respective channel identifiers and first and second program listings, and at least one of the third and fourth source identifiers with at least one of the respective channel identifiers and third and fourth program listings.

28. The system of claim 18, wherein the first and second program listings and the first and second source identifiers are stored simultaneously with the third and fourth program listings and the third and fourth source identifiers.

29. The system of claim 18, wherein the first and second program listings are received from the first source device at a first time, and wherein the third and fourth program listings are received from the second source device at a second time.